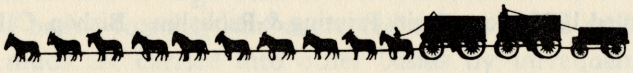
THIS PLACE CALLED DEATH VALLEY

by Hugh C. Tolford

A Reprint of Keepsake Number 25
Originally Published for
The 35th Annual Death Valley '49ers Encampment
Death Valley, California

THIS PLACE CALLED DEATH VALLEY

by Hugh C. Tolford



A Reprint of Keepsake Number 25
Originally Published for
The 35th Annual Death Valley '49ers Encampment
Death Valley, California

Copyright © 1985, The Death Valley '49ers, Inc.
Death Valley, California 92328

Reprinted 1990, Chalfant Press, Bishop, California

Reprinted 1997, Community Printing & Publishing, Bishop, California

Credits
National Park Service, U.S. Borax, George Koenig, and
A.B. Christman for his enlightening stories about Johnny Shoshone.
All illustrations used herein are from the author's collection.

THIS PLACE CALLED DEATH VALLEY

"JANUARY 19TH WE broke camp and set out for Death Valley by the old borax road . . . emerging into Death Valley near the south end of its alkali-flat. On either side were high mountains and between them the narrow valley, not more than 10 miles wide. In the bottom of the valley was the snow-white stretch of salt and alkali, and to the northward, perhaps 50 miles away, mountains, valleys, and salt-flat vanished in haze." So wrote the renowned Frederick V. Coville, botanist with the Death Valley Expedition of 1891.

Death Valley is a huge, narrow, north-south valley more than 125 miles long, four to 16 miles wide, and covers nearly 3,000 square miles in area. Salt flats encompass 200 square miles and the sand dunes near Stovepipe Wells cover 14 square miles. Bare mountain slopes tower above huge alluvial fans. Surface water evaporates in closed basins forming salt-encrusted salinas while yellow and reddish muds are carried into other basins by infrequent heavy rainstorms. Strong winds often sweep across the entire valley, piling sand in ever-changing patterns and resulting in vast dust storms. On the valley floor, marshes and a creek contrast with the surrounding desert. With elevation, moisture increases until on the high peaks there are forests of juniper, mountain mahogany, piñon and other pines. In these environments live animals as varied as bighorn sheep and desert chuckwallas.

There are traces of four distinct prehistoric cultures in Death Valley dating back some 7,000 years or more. It is believed that the Shoshone Indians entered the valley about 1,000 A.D. giving it the name of Tomesha, meaning ground afire. The first record of the white man in this remote area was the report that Indians had killed Pablo Hernandez and his wife at Resting Springs in 1844.

This immense land of Death Valley, bordered by rugged mountain ranges, was accessible through several mountain passes with such easy grades that they were like natural roadways. Since 1861, the first time a place name for Death Valley appeared in print, 14 mountain passes or canyon routes have been designated on printed maps: Boundary Canyon (Daylight Pass/Farley's Pass), Bradbury-Jubilee Pass (Salsberry Pass), Furnace Creek Wash, Goler Wash (Warm Springs Canyon), Grapevine Canyon, Sand Springs, Towne's Pass, Titus Canyon (Red Pass), Indian Pass, Ibex Pass and Wingate Pass. In addition, Greenwater Canyon, Deadman's Pass and Wildrose Canyon have been access routes to the valley.

While most California mountain passes served as part of major transportation routes for people and commerce, Death Valley was a place generally to be avoided; consequently its mountain passes, serving a remote region, were used mainly as routes to destination points within the valley itself.

Death Valley passes had been used by the Shoshone Indians for several centuries. In addition, there were countless Indian trails traversing the ranges and valley. No record exists of early Spaniards entering or exploring this area. However, John Charles Frémont might have passed close to, but certainly did not enter, the valley on his 1854 Expedition.

During the fall of 1849, a steady stream of emigrant wagons had been creaking into Salt Lake City via the Platte River and South Pass—all bound for the goldfields of California. Due to the lateness of the season, with winter coming on, some of the wagon trains split off to travel a warmer southern route. It remained for these wagon trains of between 90 to 100 half-starved emigrants pushing westward to California to actually enter Death Valley in December of 1849. The story of their harrowing experiences has already been well-documented. These first visitors—the Jayhawker and Mississippi parties—along with the Brier, Wade and Bennett-Arcane families, as well as a scattering of individuals including William Manly, John Rogers, Louis Nusbaumer and the Earhardts, entered through one of the valley's most natural pathways, Furnace Creek Wash, halting at a spot near the present-day Furnace Creek

Inn. The Georgian party, also known as the "bug smashers", came in through the little-used Indian Pass in the Funeral Range north of Furnace Creek Wash and probably camped near old Stovepipe Well.

The Wade family's wagon was the only known wagon of the original 27 to make it out of Death Valley, travelling southward to the old Spanish Trail which crossed New Mexico and Arizona and southern California. The rest, with the possible exception of the Earhardt wagon, were burned or abandoned. In fact, Panamint George, a familiar figure at Furnace Creek Ranch in the late 1930's (at which time he was nearly 100 years old), remembered distinctly the coming of the white men with long whiskers and big cows. He said his people fled from these strange visitors but later followed them to pick up their discarded possessions.

Of all the books written about Death Valley, the one most recommended is William Manly's *Death Valley in '49*, published in 1894, 45 years after Manly and Rogers' harrowing experience. It is now available in paperback.

In the years following their 1849 trek into Death Valley, many of these original '49ers returned undaunted, as guides, or on their own as prospectors, or in search for the Lost Gunsight silver lode. The Lost Gunsight silver fired up the imagination of many—the most notable of whom was desert-wise Dr. Darwin French and his party who entered the Valley in the summer of 1860. They encountered blistering heat. It was on this expedition that French, believing the pass they came through was also the escape route for Capt. Towne of the Mississippi boys party, named this mile-high west entrance Towne's Pass. (Death Valley '49er Keepsake #22, by Joseph Doctor, is good source material on Dr. French's Exploration of Death Valley).

Over the years, Towne's Pass was a well-traveled route used by the emigrant parties, prospectors and miners, followed by a flood of tourists beginning in 1927. In 1925 Bob Eichbaum proposed to build a 40-mile-long toll road from Darwin Wash over Towne's Pass to old Stovepipe Well, the watering hole long used by both Indians and white men. Upon receiving permission from Inyo County, he began construction of his road, using a telescope for

road surveying purposes. It was tough going all the way up the mountain pass, twisting and turning, dodging around big boulders instead of blasting or removing them. Finally, on Christmas Day, 1925, the small road crew camped on top of Towne's Pass, just 76 years to the day after those first emigrants, looking for a way out of the Valley, were camped on the floor of the Valley below. By the Spring of 1926, the road was nearly finished, but shifting sands prevented Eichbaum from stabilizing the roadway, so he stopped 4½ miles short of his goal of Stovepipe Well. Thereupon, he made a quick decision to locate his new Stovepipe Wells Hotel resort right there at the end of the toll road where it remains today. Back in 1916, an Essex automobile tour entered the Valley over Towne's Pass, the first organized group to come by cars. Later, in 1918, the Automobile Club of Southern California installed the first metal signs marking passes, springs and roads throughout the Death Valley region.

Daylight Pass, originally a well-worn Indian Trail to Stovepipe Well, became a busy gateway to Death Valley between 1904 and 1910. The great mining booms at Tonopah and Goldfield were followed by other new mining camps such as Bullfrog, Rhyolite and Beatty, a few miles east of Daylight Pass. The criss-crossing of Death Valley by prospectors in search of promising ore resulted in the founding of Harrisburg and Skidoo, high in the Panamint Range. The route between Rhyolite and Skidoo passed by Stovepipe Well, the only watering hole for man or beast.

Wingate Pass is another of the natural routes into Death Valley, ascending the rugged slopes of Wingate Wash, climbing up to the broad Wingate Pass at 1977 feet altitude before dropping down into Panamint Valley near present-day Trona. Although emigrants and prospectors used this route, it is best known as the route of the famed 20-mule teams which hauled borax to the railhead at Mojave. Wingate was originally known as Windy Gap Pass because the ever-present wind flattened the mules' long ears and flung dust and gravel in the faces of the drivers and swampers. The Death Valley Expedition of 1891 also came this way.

The W. T. Coleman Company of San Francisco (Coleman was

the leader of the famed San Francisco Vigilante Committee of 1856), owned the Harmony Borax Works on the floor of Death Valley. In 1882, the company instructed J.W.S. Perry, superintendent of the works, to start a new freight line. Perry designed and built ten huge wagons with spoke wheels five and seven feet in diameter, capped with tire rims eight inches wide by an inch thick. The wagonbeds were 16 feet long, four wide and six deep. Each wagon could carry a ten-ton load, exclusive of water and feed for men and mules. A team, usually of 20 mules, strung out nearly a hundred feet in front of the two wagons connected in tandem, pulled a 46,000 pound load controlled by a half-inch jerk line and considerable profanity. The 165-mile route through Wingate Pass was easily graded by Perry's men and these wondrous wagons and their borax cargos rolled out from Death Valley to Mojave without a single breakdown from 1883 to 1888.

The Epsom Salts Works was located near Wingate Pass in 1923 after a group of promoters envisioned big profits from mining a large white surface deposit of Epsom salts. A monorail was designed and built to provide cheap transportation to the railhead near Trona. It had a rail mounted on caliper legs, balancing two loaded cars on each side. The cars were pulled up and down the mountain to the rail connection by a tractor engine which straddled the monorail. The whole contraption turned out to be something of a nightmare, and the enterprise soon folded.

Notoriety of some sort came to Wingate Pass on March 2, 1906, when an Associated Press dispatch from Los Angeles reported that Death Valley Scotty and a party of mining men were traveling through Wingate Pass on their way to view Scotty's rich gold mine when they were fired upon by a gang of four assassins. Charges and counter-charges were made, arrests and re-arrests followed until after two months, the whole affair was dismissed in the courts. No matter, Scotty had his free publicity!

Spectacular Titus Canyon is another pass into Death Valley which is an adventure in geology and scenery. It was more than just an adventure for Morris Titus, a young prospector who left the mining camp of Bullfrog in 1905 and perished of thirst after

leaving a note for his companion whose body was never found. Entrance to this pass into the Valley is from the Nevada side through the slopes of the Grapevine Mountains which display an ever-changing variety of colors—red, yellow, orange, and even green. The road through this pass twists and turns through an erosion-marked basin until it reaches a narrow gap between two walls of rock sometimes towering hundreds of feet high . . . its limestone walls showing smooth surfaces at each turning of course where they have been polished by sand and gravel carried along by rushing waters often 20 to 30 feet deep.

Sand Springs and Grapevine Canyon are the two most northern entrances into Death Valley. Through this area passed the 1864-65 parties of Buel and Todd seeking the Lost Gunsight silver and Breyfogle gold, followed by Nevada Governor Blasdel's explorations in 1866 and the contingents of Lt. Wheeler's expeditions of 1871-75.

These entrances are at the 4,000 foot elevation and the terrain slopes gradually to the south until it reaches Furnace Creek at sea level, some 50 miles away. The famed Death Valley Scotty's Castle is located at the entrance to Grapevine Canyon; beyond lies Nevada and the now-vanished town of Bonnie Clare, once a stop on the old Tonopah & Tidewater Railroad. The Sand Springs pathway leads north through a sandy wash to Lida and other abandoned mining camps of Oriental Wash in Nevada.

Goler Wash lies between Telescope Peak and Wingate Pass. It starts as a deep slash in the Panamint Range and after a few miles of travel eastward to Death Valley, it opens into a high wide area known as Butte Valley with its unusual formations of vertical, narrow stratifications of contrasting bluish-gray and yellow. Good water at Anvil Spring made this route popular until the turn of the century.

Scotty's Castle is one of the authentic wonders of the West. It is an edifice that promises to survive for centuries, a great curious castle with battlemented towers and buttressed walls, Spanish tile roofs and latticed Moorish windows. It was named for Death Valley Scotty, who made himself one of the most famous legends of the American West. Today, the National Park Service conducts guided

tours through the castle. One could talk long about Scotty and his fact or fiction but one story, told by George Palmer Putnam, tells it well about this desert character . . . seems that Scotty rarely slept in the castle but maintained a rather crummy cabin nearby. When he came up to the castle, he often affected a limp which would always cause the tourists to gather around him asking what happened. Scotty usually replied that he had been bitten by a rattlesnake or black widow spider, that a mule stepped on his foot, etc. One afternoon, he limped into the castle and the solicitous tourists gathered around to find out what happened. "S' nothin' ", Scotty insisted stoically, "Nothin' at all. Just a mountain lion." "A mountain lion!" the ladies gasped. "That's it," Scotty admitted ruefully. "Down to my cabin in the lower Vine. I notice the door was part open and I pushed in sort of slow. It was a bit dark inside but perched on the shelf beside the fireplace I saw a right big lion. That sort of startled me and I stood still to see what he would do. I didn't rightly want to shoot him where he was on account of the mess it would make. Well, that lion gave one jump for the open door. He hit me an awful wallop as he went through and knocked me down. That's how I come to sprain my leg." He rubbed the offending limb thoughtfully. Some said it was gout, but Scotty said it was rattlesnakes or mules or a mountain lion.

The mining era in Death Valley began in 1873 with the discovery of silver high in the Panamint Range. "Greater than the Comstock" was the cry for Panamint City. From camps all over the West, a stream of silver-seeking humanity surged into Panamint City. It soon acquired a population of around 3,000 people, the promise of a railroad (the Los Angeles and Independence RR) and a reputation as rough as any mining camp in the west. Los Angeles too, was quite excited since it meant that if San Francisco had its Virginia City, then Los Angeles had its Panamint—certain to be as rich if not richer than the Comstock! Los Angeles merchants were elated. Unfortunately, the silver mines proved to be shallow, and by 1875 most of the crowd had left. A cloudburst in the summer of 1878 hit Surprise Valley, and a 20-foot wall of water seeking its only outlet swept the narrow confines of Panamint City. Buildings,

furniture, wagons, canned goods and a few high-button shoes spilled down the canyon onto the floor of Panamint Valley, a dozen miles distant. Panamint City was finished, but its ghost remains today for those hardy enough to brave the rough road up Surprise Canyon.

Borax was discovered in 1881 near Furnace Creek Ranch, known since 1870 as Greenland Ranch. The successful operation of Harmony Borax Works created a need for efficient transportation. The famous 20-mule team freighters (mentioned earlier) were born of this necessity. Today visitors can visit the preserved ruins of old Harmony Borax and see two of the famed wagons parked at the entrance to Furnace Creek Ranch.

Intensive mining excitement struck the Death Valley region at the turn of the century, as a result of the fabulous gold and silver finds: first at Tonopah in 1900, Goldfield in 1903, and then Bullfrog and Rhyolite in 1905, followed by copper finds at Greenwater, gold at Skidoo and other camps. After borax mining shut down in 1889, Death Valley witnessed a strong revival of the opening of the Lila C Mine in 1909, followed by the construction of the town of Ryan and the opening of additional borax mines beginning in 1914.

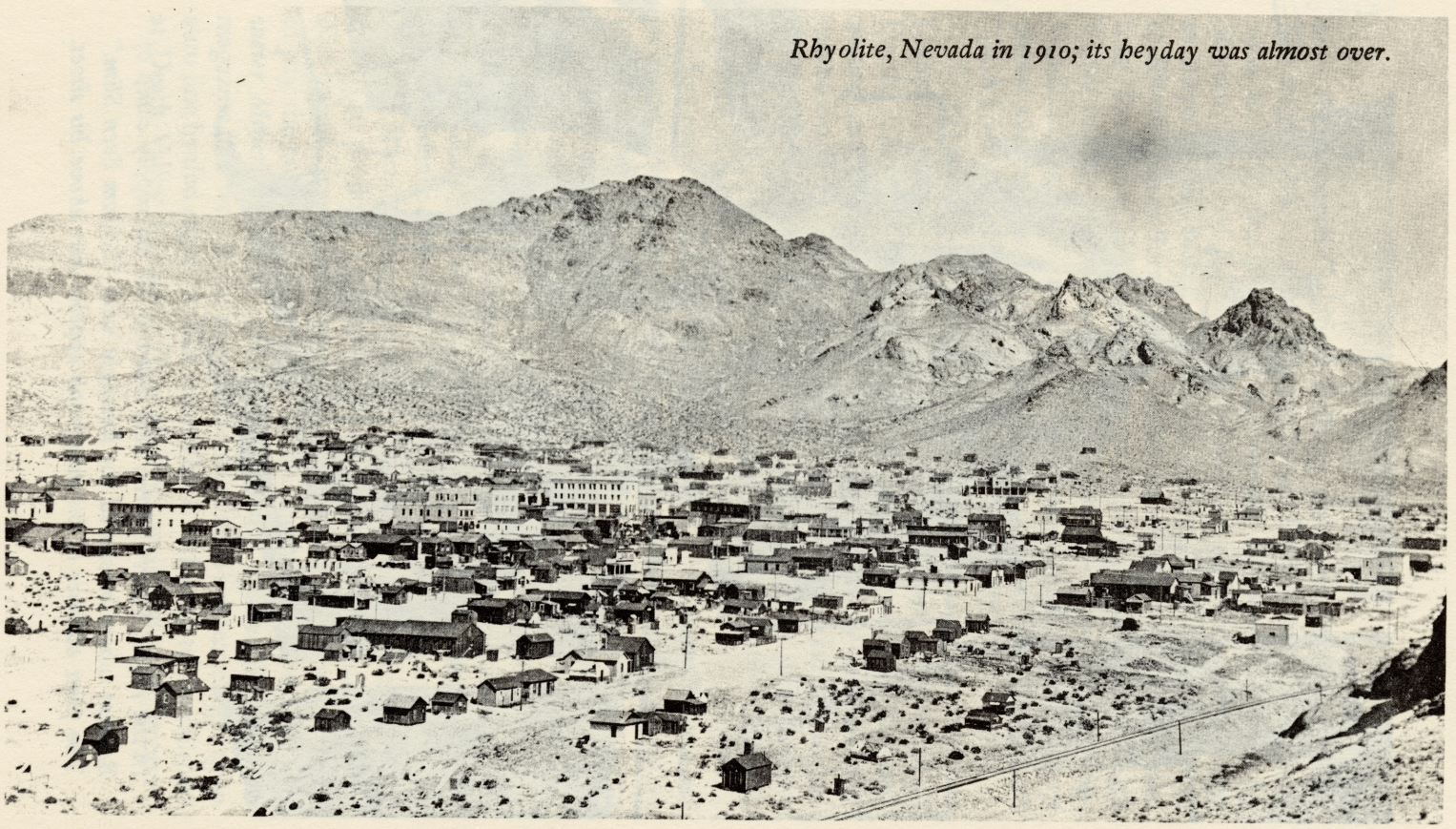
The Keane Wonder Mine was located in 1903 and was one of the most productive gold mines within the central portion of Death Valley. There had been other mines active at nearby Chloride City on the mesa above Keane Wonder, dating from 1871. The Keane Wonder produced about $800,000 in gold, and it is estimated that it cost about that much to get it out of the ground. Possibly the stock promoters made the most money. The National Park Service is preserving the remains of the Keane Wonder Mine and Mill; it, and the ruins of Chloride City make interesting exploration trips.

Early in 1903, Borax Smith graded a desert road 98 miles long from the old Lila C Mine to Ivanpah on the Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad (now the route of the Union Pacific). He planned to freight out ore by means of a steam tractor pulling wagons similar to the old 20-mule team wagons. After the first run, the steam tractor proved impractical, and Borax Smith realized that a standard gauge railroad was the only answer. He wasn't alone how-

The original Greenland Ranch on the floor of Death Valley as it appeared in 1915. Today, the site of Furnace Creek Ranch.

AT RIGHT: *Death Valley Scotty and his wife at the Southern Hotel in the booming mining camp of Rhyolite, Nev., in 1907.*

BELOW: *Dressed up in their best, this young couple happily poses for a picture outside their one-room tent house in Death Valley's copper camp of Greenwater in 1907.*



Rhyolite, Nevada in 1910; its heyday was almost over.

In the 1930's, Shorty Harris held court at the old supply camp of Ballarat where he shared the limelight with "Seldom Seen Slim." The faint outlines of his autograph appears just above his shoes.

ever, the Tonopah-Goldfield-Bullfrog gold and silver discoveries had triggered a railroad building boom. During the period from 1904 to 1908, the Las Vegas & Tonopah Railroad was built by Senator Clark—of Butte, Montana copper fame—from Las Vegas to Rhyolite; the Bullfrog-Goldfield RR was built from Goldfield to Rhyolite; and Borax Smith began construction of his 167-mile-long Tonopah & Tidewater RR from Ludlow, California, to Death Valley Junction and on to Beatty and Rhyolite to meet the Bullfrog-Goldfield. In the Spring of 1908 with three railroads in town, Beatty posted a large billboard alongside the railroad trackage which read: "BEATTY . . . THE CHICAGO OF THE WEST".

In 1914, Harry Gower was hired by the Pacific Coast Borax Company to take charge of building the 21-mile narrow gauge Death Valley Railroad from Death Valley Junction to the new mining camp of Ryan—the nearest point that any railroad ever came to reaching the floor of Death Valley. It was also Harry Gower, who, in the late 1920's, rescued Borax Smith's ill-fated steam tractor from the top of Daylight Pass so that it could be displayed at the entrance to Furnace Creek Ranch.

Just east of Dante's View was the town of Greenwater, touted to be the greatest copper camp on earth. Greenwater's promoters promised that within two years its mines would produce 100 times the ore coming from the Butte and Bingham Canyon mines. Underlying Greenwater, it was claimed, was a lode 12 miles long by five miles wide, composed of 75% pure copper. Claims sold for a total of over $4 million to a frenzied herd of investors including about a million dollars from Charles Schwab, the young president of U.S. Steel. Suddenly a whole town blossomed, led by the strangest sort of stock promoters and swindlers ever assembled. Before any mine started to produce, Greenwater Copper was listed on the NYSE. Not one of Greenwater's glory holes ever produced enough copper to pay the cost of hauling water to this dry camp. But the *Greenwater Miner* newspaper and the little *Death Valley Chuck-Walla* magazine told wonderful tales, while Alkali Bill's desert chugwagon auto line hauled eager fortune seekers back and forth to the railroad at Death Valley Junction. They all lived well until the "greatest

copper camp on earth" disintegrated under the Death Valley sun. Today, you can easily visit the site of Greenwater and then drive up the twisting road to Dante's View and look down on the flats below and wonder how it all happened, and where everyone went.

About the same vintage, was the townsite of Skidoo perched high on the Panamints over the westside of Death Valley. Like Greenwater, the site is accessible by car. Skidoo was unique in that its water was piped 23 miles by a pipeline from Telescope Peak. It also had telephone and telegraph lines strung out over the desert floor past old Stovepipe Well into Rhyolite. It had a post office, three restaurants, two boarding houses, seven saloons and also possessed a newspaper—and Joe Simpson, the only man ever reported to be hanged twice in the American West. According to eye-witness reports, Joe "Hootch" Simpson, during an unsuccessful attempt to hold up the Skidoo Trading Company's office for $20 in cash, had shot and killed James Arnold, one of Skidoo's more prominent citizens. After an inquest, an armed body of citizenry snatched "Hootch" from the Sheriff's custody and hung him to a telegraph pole cross-arm. After they had taken him down and the telegraph sped the news to the outside world, Skidoo was overwhelmed by reporters. They were disappointed to find Simpson no longer hanging from the pole. In a rare gesture of cooperation and good will, the citizenry of Skidoo rose to the occasion by stringing up Simpson one more time, so that a newsworthy photograph could be taken by the reporter from the Los Angeles *Herald.*

Shorty Harris discovered ore in the summer of 1904 near what eventually became Bullfrog and Rhyolite. Shorty, who was a legendary prospector of the Death Valley region, missed out on the strikes at Tonopah and Goldfield. His social connections were continuously graced with whiskey, of which he was a notable technician and, the absorption of the stuff he so carelessly called, "Oh Be Joyful", was tremendous. Shorty sold out his claims for $1,000 and promptly drank it all up. The emergence of Rhyolite, with its three townships, three railroads and its promise of becoming the metropolis of southern Nevada, was one of the most amazing dreams known in the mining West. Rhyolite lasted for five good

years of burro racing, 4th of July parades and beer hall carousing, and when the bottom fell out of its ore ledges in 1909, the exodus of Rhyolite's estimated 7,000 citizens was a sight to see. The Las Vegas & Tonopah RR carried many a family along with their furniture and belongings out of town by railroad flat car, without the promise of a single fare to be paid. Today, it's a memorable journey to drive over Daylight Pass toward Beatty and approach the site of Rhyolite to view the remains of banks, stores, schools, an original bottle house rebuilt in 1925 by Paramount Pictures for a movie, and the Las Vegas & Tonopah Railroad station—built to last for 1,000 years.

There were other mining booms in Death Valley, but none—except Greenwater—surpassed the fraudulent schemes of one C. C. Julian's promotion of the new town of Leadfield in 1926. "Men, Money and Mines" the headlines screamed from the new issue of the Leadfield *Chronicle* published in the Grapevine Mountains. The newspaper reported that 3,000 people attended the unique celebration at Leadfield. "Tonnage of Ore from the New California Mining District will be large". A special train carrying 340 passengers —34 of them women—had been selected from the more than 1,500 who wanted to come from Los Angeles. Arriving at Beatty by train, they were conveyed in 94 autos into Titus Canyon. Beatty had a wild night. Mr. Julian's reputation, however, was already under a cloud due to some phony oil stock promotions in Los Angeles, and, the Leadfield circus failed to pull him out of his trouble. Leadfield had a post office until 1927 and when it closed, so did the town. It's a spectacular trip driving through Titus Canyon where you can see the ghost site of Leadfield. You'll pass through sheer walls as close as 20 feet apart, with banded stripes of pastel shades, subdued and beautiful. Be sure to drive it on a sunny day—flash floods have ripped through the canyon on many occasions.

In 1930, to accommodate the growing tourist trade, the Death Valley Hotel Company (a subsidiary of the Pacific Coast Borax Company) converted the former bunk house at Death Valley Junction into the Amargosa Hotel. At the former mining camp of Ryan, the original housing for company personnel was converted

as the Death Valley View Hotel. Almost at sea level in Death Valley, above the edge of Furnace Creek Wash, the Company had completed construction of the Furnace Creek Inn late in 1927. Early advertising brochures told about the luxurious accommodations, the water from Travertine and Texas Springs cascading joyously down past the Inn to Furnace Creek Ranch where dates flourished amidst fields of alfalfa and tamarisk, and winter vegetables, milk, eggs, and poultry were produced, to supply the dining tables at the Inn. This superb Furnace Creek Inn, in addition to Furnace Creek Ranch and Stovepipe Wells Village, are now capably managed by the Fred Harvey Company.

Today, travelers along Highway 190 from Death Valley Junction, can trace the abandoned right-of-way of the narrow gauge Death Valley Railroad. Traveling east on this same highway from Furnace Creek, they can view the deep cuts of the right-of-way across the base of the Mesa Negra Range leading into the lonely ghost mining camp of Ryan.

Borax Smith's 167-mile long Tonopah & Tidewater is also gone from the scene. No long freight trains huff and puff up the grades of Amargosa River Canyon. Gone are the excited stampedes of people to the gold and silver camps, riding the T&T's buffet and reclining chair cars or the Pullmans equipped with the Baker heaters. It must have been an exciting experience also for those early-day tourists coming into Death Valley for the first time . . . riding Pullman cars into Death Valley Junction, staying overnight at the Amargosa Hotel, the next morning beginning a bouncing ride in a narrow-gauge railcar up to Ryan, an overnight stay at the Death Valley View Hotel, and after breakfast the next morning climbing aboard those big Packard and Lincoln open touring cars for a scenic ride down the mountain pass to Furnace Creek on the floor of Death Valley.

There were many legendary characters of Death Valley: Jimmie Dayton, Shorty Harris, Death Valley Scotty, Seldom Seen Slim, Chris Wicht and others. Earlier mentioned was Panamint George who witnessed the coming of the white men with long whiskers and big cows. Panamint George Hansen became a familiar figure

at Furnace Creek Ranch and upon his death in 1943 at an estimated age of 106, was replaced by his cousin, Johnny Shoshone, who assumed the role of the reigning Indian at the Ranch. Johnny said he was born "in valley, in hole" which meant in a cave at the base of the Panamint Mountain Range, probably about 1860, for he remembered helping his mother wash dishes for workers at the Charcoal Kilns up in Wildrose Canyon. Those ten great kilns, 30 feet in diameter, are still there from the 1860's when they produced charcoal for the Modoc Mine (25 miles west). The Modoc was owned by George Hearst, father of the famed William Randolph Hearst. Johnny also witnessed the first borax moved out of the Valley by the great mule teams and had indeed, known all of the famous prospectors of the Valley. Johnny did some prospecting himself and located the site that became the Shoshone-Montgomery Mine near Rhyolite. There are many versions of how Johnny gave away his rights but the most popular one is that Bob Montgomery gave him a wagon, a suit of clothes and $100. Montgomery later sold the mine for $3,000,000. He also promised Johnny that he would never have to worry about money. One time, Johnny reminded him of his promise and Montgomery gave him a job. His relatives heard that Johnny was working so they all moved in on him. Shortly thereafter, Johnny resigned his job, explaining, "No work, broke and hungry. Work, broke and hungry. No work!"

On almost any winter day, you could find Johnny lounging in the shade at the Ranch curiously watching camera-toting visitors. Johnny regularly wore two pair of trousers; both hung low. A beat-up hat and vest completed his typical dress. In later years, he walked with two canes. When he met old friends, he might give them a friendly nod, or turn his back and walk away. He talked only when he felt like it; he wasn't discourteous, it was only his mannerism. His indifference was more pronounced with women than men and he often remarked "white squaw talk too much." Johnny's thinking was always to the point. During the years when Horace Albright saw to it that a CCC camp (Civilian Conservation Corps) was established in Death Valley, Johnny observed the relationship between Indian girls and the CCC boys. Years later, when

a visitor saw a red-headed Indian, she inquired, "Halfbreed?" Answered Johnny, "No! Half CCC!" Once Johnny took a job digging ditches for the Pacific Coast Borax Company's Furnace Creek date farm. One of the top executives was being escorted on a tour by the foreman. As they walked through the date garden, the slow-tempo of Johnny's work was noticed by the executive, much to the embarrassment of the foreman. Hoping that Johnny would assume a more workman-like posture, the foreman jumped into the ditch, took Johnny's shovel, saying he would demonstrate to Johnny how it should be done. At this, Johnny walked indignantly from the scene saying, "You do it good!"

For many years, Johnny and other Indians of the Valley would migrate to a summer camp up in Wildrose Canyon where it was much cooler—just like their ancestors had. But now the Indians were largely dependent upon their white friends for food. In accepting gifts from benefactors, Johnny would position himself in a conspicuous place where he could watch but never help the benefactor unload supplies. Especially irritating to him were the cans of unlabelled food donated by the merchants from Trona. Seeing these, he would cry, "Where the picture? Where the picture? Want tomatoes, get peaches! Why no picture?"

Before the advent of automobiles into Indian life, Johnny and his group of some 40 Indians made their annual journey into the Panamints with burros, of which about 30 belonged to Johnny. These he would turn loose near the home of one of his benefactors, whose sleep was disturbed by the bells on the burros. The friend asked Johnny the reason for the bells. Johnny explained, "So we hear 'em, find 'em." "But why," asked his friend, "do you herd them to my place?" Back came Johnny's factual answer, "Ding dong all night no good for Johnny's sleep!" This same benefactor once jokingly spoke to Johnny in terms of what would happen if the tables were turned. He told Johnny that his luck had turned, that he had no money, no friends other than Johnny, nothing to eat. Johnny looked at him coldly and pointed to the ground . . . "Grass pretty high!"

Sometime about 1936, Johnny traded his burros for an old

Packard car. However, having once been a top burro man, he always felt he had a special interest in all burros. He continued to lay claim to all burros running loose and even some that weren't. Once a photographer showed Johnny his picture with some burros to see what his reaction would be. The reaction was violent. Stormed Johnny, pointing at his own image and those of the burros in the picture, "That man steal my burros!"

Much has been written about Death Valley. But there are tales still to be told. It was just a few years ago that the only journal of 1849 known to have been brought out of Death Valley surfaced. It was published by the Bancroft Library as *Valley of Salt, Memories of Wine,* and later revised in the Death Valley '49er publication, *The Lost Death Valley '49er Journal of Louis Nusbaumer.* Both not only added new information, but helped to correct misinformation in which fancy had become fact by passive acceptance and repetition, invariably quoting and compounding earlier errors.

Yet in the case of the story of the original Death Valley '49ers, one can understand. That so much of the unfortunately flawed material has been accepted as authoritative is due in great measure to few having the opportunity to dispute it. The '49er route across Central Nevada was through what still is a lonely desolate land, including the sealed-off Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) test sites. You can now follow that trail where the '49ers went, and why and when, as has never been done before, in a new book, *Beyond This Place There Be Dragons,* written by George Koenig, a past president of the Death Valley '49ers.

IN CONCLUSION

On Saturday evening, December 3rd, 1949 in Desolation Canyon, a dust cloud rose above thousands of people in a sea of automobiles trying to find their way to the scene of the California Centennial Pageant. The flood of humanity was estimated at fifty to sixty thousand, maybe more, and they had come to Death Valley from all points of the compass as a result of the publicity given this pageant in observance of California's Statehood Centennial. The fantastic success of this novel event was due to efforts of people from Kern, Inyo, San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties in addition to the Park Service, government agencies and others who offered their services. The result also was the formation of the Death Valley '49ers, Inc. After skipping the year 1950 in order to recover and also ponder the magnificent deficit incurred, the Death Valley '49ers decided to move ahead and sponsor an annual Encampment. Each year to date, the Encampment has been held on the second weekend in November and this year will mark the 35th Annual Encampment on November 8th through 11th. It now attracts over 35,000 people with 44 events covering four days, which includes the West's largest outdoor art show. It is all staged with the help of the National Park Service along with over 100 unpaid Death Valley '49er volunteers.

The basic purpose of the Death Valley '49ers is to work with the Park Service in conserving and making accessible to present and future generations, all the natural, scenic, scientific, historical and recreational facilities of the Death Valley region, and to sponsor and promote such institutions, events and services as will contribute to public understanding and appreciation of Death Valley. In addition, the '49ers have established a Scholarship Fund to assist deserving students from the Death Valley Unified School District to attend a college of their choice.

In 1985, over 135 years of Death Valley history has passed since the first emigrants struggled with their wagons down Furnace Creek

Wash and Indian Pass into this then unnamed vast forbidding territory. Many changes have occurred since those eventful days of 1849 . . . the emigrants were followed by explorers, botanists, prospectors, mining camps and towns, railroads and those early tourists who camped on the ground.

In the last 55 years, Death Valley has seen the establishment of resort hotels, a golf course, campgrounds to accommodate thousands of visitors who come to the Valley year-around. Most important, the designation of Death Valley as a National Monument brought about through the efforts of National Park Director Horace Albright and President Hoover in 1933, means that all of this has been preserved for future generations. Visitors can now travel in comfort over highways built through these historic routes such as Towne's Pass, Furnace Creek Wash, Bradbury and Jubilee Passes, Ibex Pass, Grapevine Canyon and Daylight Pass; while those such as Indian Pass, Wingate, Goler Wash, and others have retreated into history as rough tracks in the sand or rocky trails.

What hasn't changed is the spectacular scenery, the panoramic views, the vistas of ever-changing colors and the intense blue skies that are almost ever-present within this unique place called Death Valley.

Other Death Valley '49er Publications

Death Valley Tales
By ten noted authors

Goodbye Death Valley!
L. Burr Belden

A Naturalists Death Valley
Dr. Edmund C. Yaeger

Death Valley & Manly – Symbols of Destiny
Ardis Manly Walker

The Lost Death Valley '49er Journal of Louis Nusbaumer
George Koenig

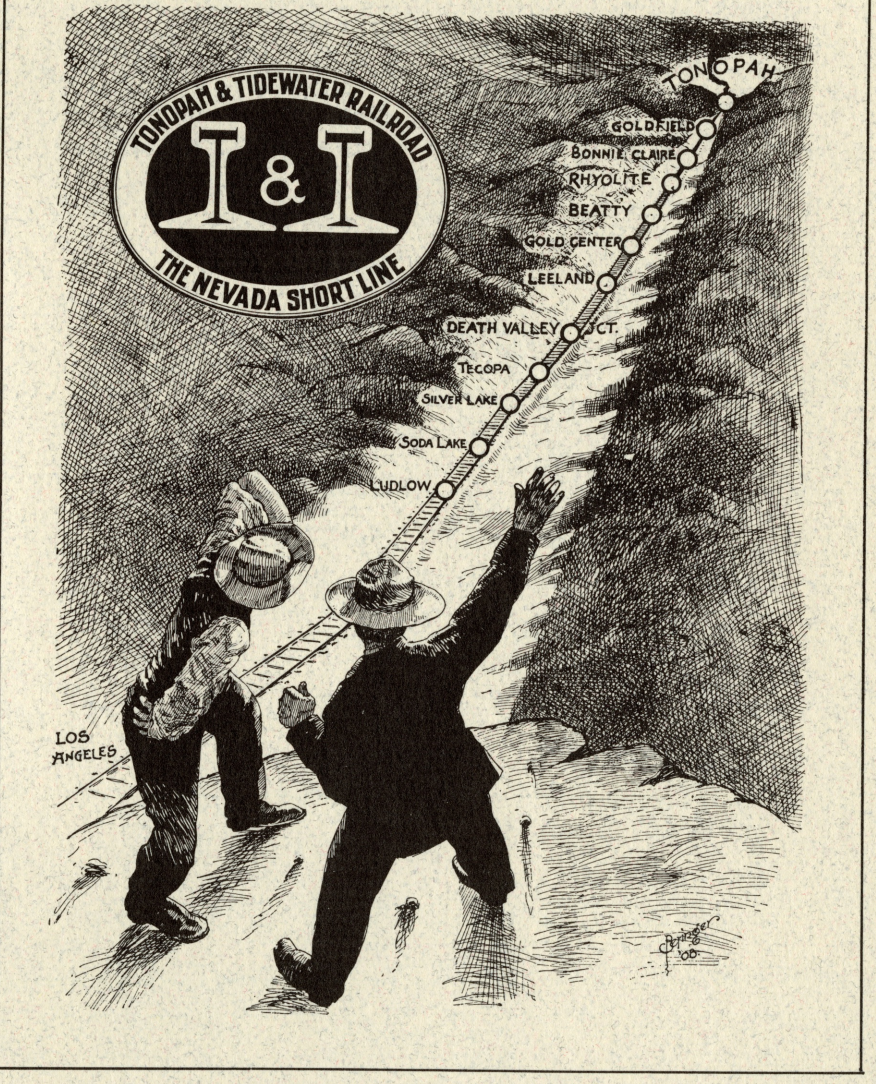
50 Years in Death Valley – Memoirs of a Borax Man
Harry Gower

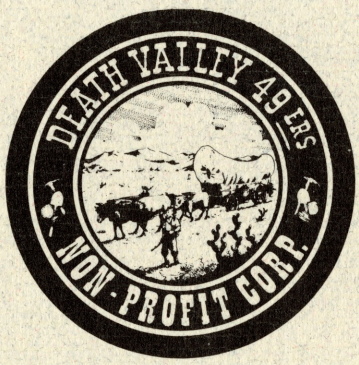
An Unnatural History of Death Valley
Paul Bailey

Death Valley Tailings
George Koenig

Death Valley in 1849
John Southworth

This Place Called Death Valley
Hugh Tolford
(English, French, German & Japanese editions)


TONOPAH & TIDEWATER RAILROAD
T&T
THE NEVADA SHORT LINE
TONOPAH
GOLDFIELD
BONNIE CLAIRE
RHYOLITE
BEATTY
GOLD CENTER
LEELAND
DEATH VALLEY JCT.
TECOPA
SILVER LAKE
SODA LAKE
LUDLOW
LOS ANGELES


DEATH VALLEY 49ERS
NON-PROFIT CORP.